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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT FOR
TURKISH PRESS REACTION TO THE UN CYPRUS PLAN

SUMMARY:

The Turkish press has for the most part reacted very positively to UN Secretary General Annan's plan for resolving the Cyprus issue. Most commentators have argued that, despite some negative aspects of the proposal, the Annan plan is probably Turkey's "last and best chance" to achieve a comprehensive settlement. The initial cautious official response to the plan stood in contrast to a series of optimistic commentaries that appeared in Turkey's mainstream and Islamist press. Press analyses generally view the Annan plan as an "historic chance" that should not be missed. The position of most influential Turkish media on the Cyprus plan is perhaps best summed up by the November 16 front-page headline in the national daily "Milliyet": "If Not Now, When?" End summary.

COMMENTATORS URGE NEGOTIATION:

The positive press reaction to the UN plan stems from the perception that the plan recognizes, for the first time, the sovereignty and equality of Northern Cyprus. Most commentators have also noted the "disappointing" elements of the plan, particularly with regard to territorial concessions, refugee resettlement, and the reduction of Turkish troops. They also point out the inherent advantage of the Greek Cypriots, who will become part of the EU with or without a settlement. While pointing out the negatives, however, most columnists have consistently advocated a negotiation process aimed at reaching a settlement. There is a general consensus (with limited exceptions among nationalist commentators) in the Turkish media that the Annan plan should not be rejected, and that the plan's shortcomings should be dealt with at the bargaining table. Mehmet Yilmaz of "Milliyet," for example, wrote that "an experienced leader like Denktas has the ability to perform a diplomatic juggling act and is capable of correcting mistakes in the plan at the negotiating table. If Denktas believes he does not want to discuss this plan, then I think he should retire." Negative public comments by Turkish officials have been largely discounted in commentaries and editorials. When the nationalist daily "Ortadogu" ran a front-page story citing former Foreign Minister Sukru Sina Gurel's characterization of the plan as a "plot against the Turkish Cypriot nation," the same paper's foreign policy editor wrote on the same day that "sources close to diplomatic circles tell us that the initial evaluation of Kofi Annan's Cyprus plan was deemed positive."

SAMPLE COMMENTARIES:

[Following is a representative sample of Turkish commentaries -- both positive and negative -- on the Cyprus plan during the period November 13-19]

"Dream Might Come True in Cyprus"

Editor-in-Chief Mehmet Y. Yilmaz wrote in mass appeal Milliyet (11/19): "The Turkish people want to see a settlement in Cyprus. The Turkish people want to see Turkey in the EU. As for the Turkish Cypriots, they do not want to be left out while the Greek Cypriots join the European Union. . This common desire calls for Denktas to evaluate the UN plan very seriously. An experienced leader like Denktas has the ability to perform a diplomatic juggling act and correcting mistakes in the plan at the negotiating table. If Denktas believes he does not want to discuss this plan at the negotiating table, then I think he should retire."

"Kofi Annan's Cyprus Plan"

Kamuran Ozbir wrote in nationalist Ortadogu (11/15):
"Sources close to diplomatic circles tell us that the

initial evaluation of Kofi Annan's Cyprus plan was deemed positive, particularly because of its recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. There are, however, certain elements which cause serious concern, such as territorial concessions, property issues, and demographic movements. . It seems that the Turkish Foreign Ministry will have to conduct a comprehensive study of the plan, which might take at least a couple of days, and leave the matter for a final decision at the upcoming National Security Council meeting at the end of November."

"Style is important on the Cyprus issue"

Ferai Tinc wrote in mass appeal Hurriyet (11/15): "The current situation calls for a diplomatic juggling act. . The upcoming Copenhagen summit is not only going to evaluate the Cyprus situation in light of current developments, but also make more binding decisions for Turkey. The EU's Accession Partnership Document clearly draws a direct link between Turkey's EU process and the Cyprus issue. . We do not mean to say 'let's give away Cyprus and get rid of this issue.' Yet we don't have to reject efforts for a settlement with crude rhetoric either. The Turkish side should announce its readiness to negotiate the Annan plan."

"What is Ankara's position?"

Sami Kohen wrote in mass appeal Milliyet (11/15): "There are certain parts to which the Turkish side would object, such as the territorial concessions and demographic movements. Yet the plan, very positively, verifies the equality and sovereignty of the two sides -- something that we have been working for years to achieve. Now is the time to think realistically and act pragmatically. Rejection of the plan will definitely work against the interests of Turkey as well as Turkish Cypriots."

"The UN plan is a death verdict for the TRNC"

Columnist Hasan Unal argued in Islamic-intellectual Zaman (11/14): "The UN plan aims at liquidating the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) as a state and the Turkish Cypriots as a nation. . It might give the impression that it meets Turkish demands on constitutional issues, but in fact it provides an opportunity for the founding of a unitary Greek Cypriot state. . The plan also gives very limited and very unproductive territory to the Turkish Cypriots. . In short, the UN plan expects Turkish Cypriots to make vital concessions without meeting their ultimate demands. Cyprus will gradually become a Greek Cypriot island. It is clear that Turkey's security guarantees will not be valid the moment Cyprus joins the EU."

"Cyprus"

Hadi Uluengin calls the UN plan a historic chance in mass appeal Hurriyet (11/14): "Clearly this is a unique chance for a Cyprus settlement and definitely should not be missed. Creating excuses or making evasive remarks in order not to take advantage of this chance would be a crucial mistake. Whoever makes this mistake, whether it is the Turks or the Greeks, will be harshly judged by history. . The Annan plan is almost perfect. Therefore, whichever side rejects the plan and causes the continuation of a 'no-settlement' situation will be doomed to deprive its people of the opportunities coming with the new millennium."

"The Blending of Models"

Sami Kohen wrote in mass appeal Milliyet (11/13): "The UNSG seems to have found a middle way between 'federation and confederation' as well as between the Swiss model and the Belgian model for Cyprus. Therefore, both sides will find certain elements of this plan acceptable, and certain parts unacceptable. . From our side, it is very important that the Annan document complies with Turkey's longstanding insistence on partnership and equality in Cyprus. . Yet there are some negative points which the Turkish side might not like very much, such as giving away some territory, the migration and settlement issues, and the disarmament of the island. However, a constructive approach can solve these issues through fair and just bargaining."

"Turkey should not miss this chance"

Mehmet Ali Birand supports the plan in mass appeal/sensational Posta (11/13): "Turkey faces a final historic opportunity. Though it does not fully satisfy the Turkish side, the Cyprus package offers extremely important gains. Casting aside the 'We will not give away even a pebble' rhetoric, we must take the most we can get and close this file. If we allow ourselves to be slaves to our old habits, we will lose Cyprus legally on the day after the upcoming Copenhagen summit. . In that case, everyone will be bound to suffer from the harmful effects."

"The Annan Plan"

Semih Idiz opined in mass appeal Aksam (11/13): "It seems that the Turkish Cypriot leadership will not burn his bridges, but instead will continue to discuss the plan, which is described by Turkey as 'a plan with a glass of water, half empty and half full.' That means the two sides will negotiate the plan and work on the nuances. . The two Cypriot sides will also feel pressured, because the US and UK are strongly supporting the Annan plan behind the scenes."